UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.38
2 January 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 17 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. GERVAIS (Côte d'Ivoire)

CONTENTS

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued)

(h) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (continued)

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

96-80950 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued)

(h) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (A/51/186-E/1996/80) (continued)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to resume its consideration of item 6 (h) entitled "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction".

Mr. PANKIN (Russian Federation) expressed his delegation's satisfaction with the Secretary-General's report on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. He called for broader access for all countries to technological means of disseminating disaster reduction experience and practices, and for them to be integrated into a worldwide early-warning system through an international convention on the use of communications for disaster relief. The Russian Federation was also supporting efforts to expand the involvement of players outside the United Nations in disaster relief, such as banks, insurance companies and private businesses.

The groups working in the context of the Decade to enhance disaster relief and mitigation worldwide had made satisfactory progress to date. However, the closing event of the Decade was of great importance, as it would define the direction of future efforts to coordinate and stimulate disaster relief cooperation. The Russian Federation had been actively involved in all aspects of the Decade, and looked forward to a productive and cost-effective closing event.

Ms. LOW (United States of America) said that her delegation fully supported the goals of the Decade and the need to integrate disaster reduction measures into sustainable development programmes. It strongly believed that progress to date in natural disaster reduction should be consolidated and linked with economic and social development and environmental protection. Activities like the Disaster Management Training Programme were critical and cost-effective and should continue to be assigned top priority.

While progress to date had been inconsistent, the United States viewed the overall growth in the number and diversity of initiatives inside and outside the

United Nations as a positive development. Her delegation strongly urged the Decade secretariat to continue to emphasize coordination of its programmes within the United Nations system, especially the coordination and integration of disaster relief programmes into United Nations Development Programme country strategies. The United Nations should also ensure that the Decade closing event should focus on integrating disaster reduction into national planning and reviewing specific natural disaster reduction outcomes achieved during the Decade.

Mr. LI Tianwu (China) called for a thorough review of the accomplishments of the Decade in order to ensure the timely achievement of its objectives. He also called for strengthened international cooperation on natural disaster reduction, enhanced awareness of the relationship between natural disaster reduction and sustainable development, and the integration of natural disaster reduction programmes into national development planning.

The developed countries should provide developing countries with the funds and technical assistance needed to strengthen natural disaster reduction capacity and achieve sustainable development. The Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action should be implemented comprehensively, and the Decade trust fund should be used primarily for natural disaster reduction in developing countries.

Ms. McNISH (Jamaica) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It expressed sympathy to the victims of recent natural disasters.

Agenda item 6 (h) was of particular interest to Jamaica and other Caribbean countries, because the extreme vulnerability of small island developing countries to natural disasters had become a major obstacle to sustained economic and social development. The impact of natural disasters was far greater in poorer countries than in industrialized countries, and recovery was much slower. Jamaica was therefore convinced of the need to integrate natural disaster reduction into the sustainable development process.

It was important to accord priority to the strengthening of national and regional activities and mechanisms with a view to increasing the capabilities of disaster-prone countries in preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. The Declaration and Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States provided a comprehensive blueprint for such action. Strong commitment and support at the international level and by the United

Nations humanitarian assistance agencies were indispensable for the successful implementation of the Declaration.

Her delegation believed that the proposals relating to natural disaster mitigation set out in the report on the fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (E/1996/28) should be included in the international strategies for the Decade. It noted the Commission's call for an effective synergy between the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action (decision 4/16, para. 15 (c)). To ensure effective and long-term solutions, international humanitarian policies must also emphasize rehabilitation and development; the post-disaster development phase was of critical importance.

Her delegation commended the Decade secretariat for its work in achieving the goals of the Decade and urged continued and additional funding commitments to support that work. It endorsed the proposed framework for the closing event of the Decade.

Strategies and activities developed during the Decade must be sustained beyond the Decade. Institutional arrangements, mechanisms and procedures as well as technical and financial support must be continued. The suggestions set forth in the report for future forms of organization should be carefully considered.

Mr. TALBOT (Guyana) said that the statement of the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China fully reflected his delegation's concerns. He also expressed his delegation's deep appreciation of the prompt and efficient cooperation provided to Guyana by the United Nations, its Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the international donors during recent natural disasters.

Mr. MURAOKA (Japan) noted with satisfaction the initiatives at the national, subregional and regional levels that had taken place during the Decade. Japan recognized the importance of countries' sharing natural disaster experiences, especially since the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake of 1995, and was considering support for the Decade secretariat's global project for disaster-resistant urbanization and seismic risk assessment in urban areas (RADIUS).

Japan called upon the Decade secretariat to ensure that the closing event of the Decade was as practical as possible, supported the Secretary-General's

call to fully integrate the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action into the implementation of the action plans of all recent United Nations conferences, and requested clarification of how such integration was to be achieved. He also inquired how coordinated institutional measures were to be maintained beyond the Decade under the International Framework of Action and how the concept and objectives of the Decade could be coordinated with activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Ms. SIBAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO continued to contribute to the activities of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. In implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, UNESCO had accelerated and further expanded its programme related to natural hazards, which currently focused on improved understanding of risks, hazard mapping, monitoring of earthquakes and volcanoes, floods and tsunamis and on technical, educational and information measures for risk mitigation. The programme also sought to integrate disaster reduction into environmental and developmental concerns.

UNESCO continued to cooperate with the national focal points and committees for the Decade and was working closely with the secretariat of the Decade in the design and implementation of joint projects. It was concerned about the insufficient support given to the Decade within the United Nations system. It had always considered that prevention was the only cost-effective way to deal with potential disasters, and it believed that the world community must take a long-term view and be proactive rather than reactive.

UNESCO strongly endorsed the statement that had resulted from the seventh session of the Scientific and Technical Committee; it continued to view the strengthening of capacity-building for vulnerability reduction and disaster prevention as a distinct fundamental activity towards sustainable development. It appealed for a distinct identity and autonomy for the organizational arrangements for the Decade. It also felt that the secretariat of the Decade should be strengthened. It had offered to host the forthcoming session of the Scientific and Technical Committee and hoped that on that occasion there would be a serious consideration of ways and means of pursuing the objectives of the Decade for the remainder of its term and beyond.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that her delegation fully associated itself with the statement of the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the

Group of 77 and China. It stressed the importance of the linkage between natural disaster reduction and sustainable development. The Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action should be fully integrated into the concerted approach towards the implementation of the action plans of all recent global United Nations conferences, and natural disaster reduction should be considered as a cross-cutting issue in the evaluation of Agenda 21.

Her delegation also strongly supported the pursuit of an effective overall natural disaster reduction strategy beyond the Decade, and it requested that future reports on natural disaster reduction should include information on the activities of relevant specialized agencies.

Mr. ELO (Director, International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction), responding to questions raised by delegations, said that the secretariat of the Decade took part in the development of programmes concerning natural and environmental disasters within the framework of the Commission for Sustainable Development. The issue of integrating the Yokohama Plan of Action into the outcomes of recent international conferences was being discussed with the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, while the concerns relating to the activities of UNHCR were being channelled through the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Finally, his office was working to establish a sustainable and solid basis for protecting development programmes from the adverse effects of natural disasters through the strategies and programmes established for the Decade.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/186-E/1996/80).

It was so decided.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS (E/1996/45 and Add.1, E/1996/46-50; E/1996/NGO/4)

Mr. MOOY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/1996/45 and Add.1), said that the main document dealt with various substantive issues, while the addendum was concerned with matters requiring action by the Council or its attention following the regular sessions of the regional commissions. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which held its sessions on a biennial basis, had not met in 1996. He drew attention to the economic and

social surveys of the respective regions prepared by the regional commissions, and to their annual reports.

The report of the Secretary-General described the follow-up activities of the commissions in pursuance of the relevant decisions and recommendations of global conferences. The commissions had major responsibility at the regional level for the preparation of regional plans and programmes of action and remained very active in the follow-up to and implementation of the commitments made as a result of those conferences. The report also described the growing relationship of the regional commissions with the relevant subregional organizations and other organizations, both within the United Nations and outside.

Because of their proximity and ability to render cost-effective services, the regional commissions were able to maintain regular contact with their membership. They were therefore well aware of the often profound changes that were taking place in the economic and social structures of member countries and the need to adapt their work to changing needs and emerging development challenges, in partnership with those countries. An account of the reform process was provided in section III of the report. The regional commissions would welcome guidance on the relevant issues arising from General Assembly resolution 50/227.

The Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its thirty-sixth session, had called for increased interregional cooperation. The regional commissions fully shared that objective and for years had been seeking to develop such cooperation; some projects had been endorsed by the Council itself but had not been implemented because of lack of funds. While bilateral donors were usually available to fund regional projects, they were not so readily forthcoming to support interregional projects. Efforts to secure funds from the funding organizations of the United Nations had not produced the desired results. The regional commissions had submitted several proposals and project ideas for interregional cooperation in the report.

Mr. AMOAKO (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)) introducing document E/1996/47, said that the continuing recovery in output and performance in the ECA region was encouraging. In 1995, the African economy had experienced its highest annual growth rate since the beginning of the decade. In more than half of the countries of the region, increases in gross domestic product exceeded

population growth. While several countries remained at the lower end of the growth spectrum, the overall turnabout was a vindication of the economic reforms and sound policies which most of the countries were pursuing.

Several critical development issues, however, continued to be of major concern to the region. Africa's share in aggregate world trade and output remained far below its share of world population, and the decline of its share in the trade of developing countries had been even more dramatic. The food situation in some parts of Africa had been a serious cause for concern in 1995, despite good harvests in a number of countries. Until now, the region had not benefited from the surge in world investment flows. It was hoped that as more countries pursuing reform programmes showed signs of sound recovery, greater numbers of foreign investors would be attracted to Africa. Finally, external debt and debt-servicing obligations continued to pose a major threat to the financing of economic recovery and negatively affected the availability of resources.

The Commission's programme of work addressed issues such as poverty reduction through improved food security, financing of transport and communications, the integration of environment considerations into agricultural planning and policy strategies and improving public expenditure for rural development. The Commission continued to support follow-up activities and regional programmes, in particular the United Nations Second Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (1991-2000) and the United Nations Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa (1993-2002). The Secretariat had continued its cooperation with the Organization of African Unity in implementing the Abuja Treaty establishing the African economic community. Efforts in that regard were concentrated on the appropriation of the various protocols related to the treaty.

The reform initiated by the Commission during the last quarter of 1995 was on course. It was guided by three principles, namely, excellence, cost-effectiveness and partnerships, and had begun with a series of consultations at all levels, including with management and staff members. A meeting in January with high-level African experts from government, the private sector, academia and civil society had been followed by a meeting in April with representatives of United Nations agencies, bilateral donors and some international foundations. The Commission's new operational mode included fewer and better reports, reduced

meetings, new arrangements for networking in tackling Africa's development problems, increased interaction with member States, and the forging of strategic alliances with partners.

Mr. BERTHELOT (Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), introducing document E/1996/46, said that growth in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, driven by domestic demand, had been particularly strong in 1995. Western Europe was now the main trading partner, accounting for 50 to 60 per cent of their trade. Inflation had continued to decline but was still in the double-digit range. The situation in Russia remained uncertain, although attempts to control price fluctuations had succeeded. During the first half of 1996 approximately half of the countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had experienced positive growth rates, with production at a higher level than during the previous year. Their trade with Russia had increased, as had trade amongst themselves.

In Western Europe, growth forecasts were low, at 1.5 per cent for 1996. In response to weak economic growth, monetary policies in many Western European countries had been relaxed further in the early months of 1996. The progressive easing of monetary policy was reflected in the fall in short-term interest rates in most of Europe. Long-term interest rates had edged upward, influenced by capital markets in the United States. The 1.5 per cent growth rate could possibly drop to 1 per cent as a result of highly restrictive budgetary policies pursued by most countries in Western Europe.

With regard to reform in ECE, he said that in April 1995 the Commission had decided to reassess its working methods in order to enhance their effectiveness. To that end, it had sent a detailed questionnaire to all member States asking them to rate ECE programmes and activities. Having reviewed the responses to the questionnaires, the Commission had found a broad convergence of views among member States. In the months to come, it would finalize a plan of action which would define its role, streamline the intergovernmental machinery and identify programme elements on which to focus. The aims of the reform were to ensure a streamlined Commission, better able to respond to the needs of member States and to carry out its basic role of integrating all the countries of the region and harmonizing policies on the basis of common institutions and norms.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) introducing document E/1996/49, said that

although the economic situation in Latin America and the Caribbean during the past year had been characterized by contradictory tendencies, the region had demonstrated vitality, a capacity to respond creatively to opportunities offered by the international context and intraregional cooperation, and an ability to face new challenges. Nevertheless, the rates of growth achieved were insufficient given the level of technological progress required and the need to overcome social problems.

Since July 1995, ECLAC had focused on stability and growth, savings and investment, productive restructuring, global competitiveness and public policies. It had continued to monitor economic and social trends and to expand a data bank containing the most complete and current information available on economic and social indicators in the region. ECLAC research activities had also continued, and the Commission had hosted many meetings of government officials and other individuals. It had adopted a regional plan on human settlements as part of the regional preparations for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

The ECLAC secretariat had continued its operational activities, focusing on technical assistance and training, in some cases, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme. The thrust of the Commission's efforts in the Caribbean and Central American subregions had been to strengthen cooperation within the subregion and between it and the rest of the hemisphere. ECLAC had continued to support intraregional cooperation, both on its own and in collaboration with other institutions concerned with subregional integration. One analysis which had resulted from its cooperation with the Organization of American States and the Inter-American Development Bank had dealt with the situation small economies would face if a free-trade area comprising the entire hemisphere was established.

Lastly, he noted that one resolution adopted at the Commission's twenty-sixth session contained decisions aimed at increasing the efficiency, efficacy and relevance of the Commission and established a working group, open to all ECLAC member countries, which would define priorities for the Commission's work programme and recommend strategic directions for its future activities.

Mr. MOOY (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), introducing document E/1996/48, said that ESCAP had

further consolidated its reputation as the most economically dynamic region in the world. Almost all countries had maintained their strong commitment to reform, restructuring, stabilization and the liberalization of their economies, and the expanding role of the private sector had been emphatically laid out in national policies with the ultimate objective of promoting investment, trade and economic growth.

Considerable progress had been achieved in the provision of social services throughout the region, although deficiencies persisted in many areas, notably, education and public health. Notwithstanding the progress made, more than one third of the population of the region's developing countries remained mired in poverty, which was a potential threat to social stability. The Commission had agreed on the need for a multi-pronged approach to tackling issues relating to rural poverty alleviation and sustainable development. It also had stressed the importance of a participatory approach to programme formulation and implementation entailing the mobilization of all social forces and the removal of constraints on the growth of the agricultural sector.

ESCAP had continued to play a role in fostering regional cooperation in order to enable progress to be equitably shared by all countries and had directed its secretariat to review and recommend measures for further strengthening such cooperation, steps which were crucial given the region's reliance on trade, investment and technology as the engines for growth and development. The Commission had decided to recommend that the Council should amend its terms of reference to include the Republic of Turkey as a regional member and to recommend membership status for the Republic of Palau, actions which would further enhance regional cooperation.

ESCAP had adopted 11 resolutions intended to promote social and economic development and cooperation in the region and had endorsed preparations for a conference to be held in India in October 1996, on policy measures to alleviate infrastructure bottlenecks in the region's developing countries.

Private capital flows in the region, which had more than doubled in the past decade, were concentrated primarily in the faster-growing economies, while many of the poorer countries relied almost entirely on development assistance for survival. The ESCAP secretariat had devoted greater attention during the past year to encouraging countries at different levels of development to share experience, know-how, growth and prosperity, with the aim of enhancing technical

cooperation and cooperation in trade and investment. At a time when financial resources were increasingly scarce, ESCAP planned to explore options for mobilizing third-party financial assistance, from bilateral or multilateral sources, as a means of financing development assistance programmes.

In the light of the financial crisis affecting the United Nations, ESCAP had been taking a close look at how it could continue to deliver its services - which were needed now more than ever before - as effectively as possible, and an assessment of its thematic programme structure was in progress.

Lastly, he noted that ESCAP was currently acting on recommendations for regional action to follow up the recent major international conferences.

Mr. EL-BEBLAWI (Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)), introducing document E/1996/50, said that ESCWA had taken fully into consideration the fact that the political and economic situation in the region had continued to evolve rapidly and unpredictably since June 1995. Since the second half of 1995, economic developments and social trends had been influenced by such factors as the state of political relations among the countries of the region, the extent and nature of regional cooperation, general trends in the oil sector, economic sanctions against Iraq, the regional and national investment climates and the Middle East peace process.

He cited the information on overall economic performance in the region contained in paragraph 1 of document E/1996/50. Social problems continued to relate mainly to the inequality in income distribution, with resulting disparities in the level of living and the emergence of poverty pockets, a situation further aggravated by inadequate employment opportunities, high population growth, intensive rural to urban migration and poor educational opportunities. The cycle of poverty and unemployment threatened to destabilize social structures by creating marginalized groups which expressed frustration through violence and extremism.

In an ongoing effort to enhance regional cooperation, ESCWA committees had continued their work and ESCWA had pursued its cooperation with regional and international organizations and other United Nations bodies in the implementation of its work programme. The most significant coordination mechanism was the regional inter-agency coordinating group established in April 1995.

With regard to the major international conferences, ESCWA had focused on follow-up activities relating to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development adopted at the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women. It had also participated in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

During the period under review, ESCWA had responded to a broad range of the region's needs in the economic and social sectors, within the framework of subprogrammes on management of natural resources and the environment, improvement of the quality of life, economic development and cooperation, regional development and global changes, and special issues. Technical assistance was provided through regional advisory services in the fields of agriculture, data processing, energy, environment, industry, national accounts, social development, transport, water resources and issues relating to the World Trade Organization.

Participation in a number of regional meetings held under United Nations and other auspices, had enabled the Commission to start playing, as a regional partner, a renewed socio-economic role closely linked to the Middle East peace process. ESCWA was well equipped and eager to play its part as a key partner in efforts to reshape the future of the region.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.39
6 January 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 39th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 18 July 1996, at 11 a.m.

President: Mr. GERVAIS (Côte d'Ivoire)

later: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued)

(i) FOLLOW-UP TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/106: BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS (continued)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Office of Conference and Support Services, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza.

96-80953 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 11.20 a.m.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES, CONFERENCES AND RELATED QUESTIONS (continued) (E/1996/L.26)

(i) FOLLOW-UP TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 50/106: BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Mr. MARRERO (United States of America) introduced draft resolution E/1996/L.26 entitled "Corruption and bribery in transnational commercial activities", which represented part of a continuing effort by the United States to combat international organized crime and corruption, including money laundering, smuggling and related activities.

Bribery distorted markets and hindered economic development. It also undermined democratic accountability and created a sort of non-tariff barrier to trade that disadvantaged companies which refused to engage in the practice. The draft resolution currently before the Council encouraged Governments to take action to combat bribery. It reaffirmed the link between good governance and economic growth. Preventing corrupt practices was an important element in improving a nation's international business environment. It enhanced fairness and competitiveness in transnational business transactions and benefited the general public.

Regarding the issue of reform and reorganization of the Economic and Social Council, his delegation believed that the best way to enhance the Council's relevance was to ensure that it addressed relevant issues. The Council could be strengthened by engaging issues of significant international concern rather than claiming incapacity and incompetence or seeking to delegate difficult substantive issues to other bodies. The issue of international crime and corruption was one such relevant issue.

Mrs. NASCIMBENE de DUMONT (Argentina) said that the issue of corruption was one of the newest and most disturbing challenges currently facing the international community, and her delegation welcomed its recent inclusion on the agendas of a number of high-level inter-American conferences. The Council should continue to take a leadership role in combating corruption.

Mr. TEJERA PARIS (Venezuela) said that his Government was particularly concerned by the tendency of exporters from certain countries to resort to automatic bribery of corrupt procurement officials, even in the developed world. Corruption in general and administrative corruption in particular posed a threat to the whole international community and therefore demanded a collective response. Venezuela had initiated a number of anti-corruption measures both domestically and at the regional level.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS (continued) (E/1996/45 and Add.1, E/1996/46-50 and E/1996/NGO/4)

Mr. ACUÑA (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group attached great importance to the role of the regional commissions in assisting Governments in the implementation of action-oriented programmes in the economic, social and related fields. Such programmes should include capacity-building for science, technology and industrialization; development and utilization of natural resources and energy; infrastructure, communications and public sector reform; and development of financial markets. Programmes should be supportive of a regional enabling environment for sustained economic growth and poverty eradication.

Cooperation at regional level was crucial in implementing an international agenda for sustained economic development and translating into action regional programmes identified with the development process, while taking into account the specific features and development needs of each region.

Regional commissions provided a forum for such cooperation and enhanced the international environment in terms of financial flows, technical cooperation and trade. They provided tried and tested intergovernmental machinery for supporting cooperation among experts from the public and private sectors, policy planners and government officials, thus enabling them to elaborate regional strategies, norms, standards and instruments.

The regional commissions had an important input in the Council's policy deliberations in the high-level and coordination segments. At the very least, they brought a regional perspective that enriched the Council's debate on development issues; the matter of regional cooperation should therefore be discussed at the beginning of the Council's general segment. Dialogue between the regional commissions and the Council, which was the central body for policy and coordination in the economic and social sectors, should be strengthened. In

addition, the regional commissions should seek cooperative working arrangements with the relevant units of the Bretton Woods institutions, which could include joint research on opening up regional economies, collaboration on industrialization and physical and economic infrastructure and data collection and information exchange.

Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon) congratulated the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) on his excellent report which contained invaluable information for future planning of development projects in the region and indicated areas of top priority. In order to gain a fuller appreciation of the regional commission's work it should be read in conjunction with document E/ESCWA/1996/3, which provided comprehensive details on the advisory and cooperation activities undertaken by ESCWA. His Government welcomed the relocation of ESCWA headquarters to Beirut and pledged to fulfil Lebanon's commitments in that respect.

Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. MARTINI (Observer for Guatemala), speaking on behalf of the six Central American countries, recalled that the issue of reform of the United Nations had been raised repeatedly and that the question of how to restructure the regional commissions was part of the ongoing debate on reform. Although some believed that the United Nations, as a global body, should not deal with regional concerns but should leave those to regional bodies, his delegation believed that the regional commissions had an important role to play within a restructured United Nations system. The commissions were the bodies most closely in touch with regional developments. In addition, they were interdisciplinary in nature and were directly in touch with the specific demands of Governments. The Central American States were highly supportive of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, which had clearly shown its capacity to adapt itself to developments in the region.

Decentralization of many of the activities currently carried out in New York and Geneva to the regional commissions would be a positive first step. The allocation of responsibilities to the regional commissions should be based on the principle of comparative advantage. His delegation agreed that it was necessary to enhance the productivity of the Secretariat, including that of the regional commissions. There was also room for management reform and adjustments

in work programmes. But the United Nations should continue to maintain a regional presence and seek to reconcile regionalism with multilateralism.

His delegation also endorsed the view that the matter of regional cooperation should be taken up by the Council earlier in its session in order to enable the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions to attend the high-level segment, and proposed that the Council should take a decision to that effect.

Mr. SKRYBANT (Poland) said that, after almost 50 years, the member Governments of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) were about to embark on reforms aimed at redefining the role and place of the Commission on the changed international stage. Poland considered that review of activities of the greatest importance, for it intended to apply for full membership in the European Union and was taking advantage of the ECE institutional framework with a view to improving its prospects. It welcomed the decision adopted by ECE at its fifty-first session aimed at increasing the business community's participation in the activities of the Commission, and would also view favourably greater involvement by non-governmental organizations.

It seemed to him that, while the membership of the Commission had increased from 34 to 55 countries and the list of problems to be coped with was growing steadily, the response of the Commission and of other United Nations bodies was frequently inadequate due, in part, to insufficient resources and calls for rationalization and streamlining. While it might be tempting and even prudent to rely increasingly on arrangements with financial institutions, it was also necessary to consider the need for preserving the principle of universality.

Mr. GRANT (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the delegations of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia also associated themselves with his statement. The report of the Secretary-General, in the section on the overall activities of the Commissions, gave the Council a valuable summary of the work being undertaken. However, the section dealing with the follow-up to recent conferences gave rise to a number of questions. Whereas the action programmes of the conferences identified action at the regional level as an integral part of the implementation process and envisaged the regional economic commissions as having an important part to play, the report acknowledged that only in very general terms. As a result, it was

difficult to assess accurately the extent to which the regional commissions were fulfilling the roles stipulated for them in the various action programmes. More detailed information on the follow-up to those conferences would be welcomed in the next report. The European Union was surprised that no mention had been made of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

With regard to trends in regional cooperation, the report provided a very useful summary from a regional perspective of the generally encouraging trends in the world economy, stimulated by increasing globalization. The European Union welcomed the increasingly active role being played by integration groupings and attached priority to establishing and strengthening ties with regional groupings throughout the world. The work being undertaken by all the regional commissions in that area could only further enhance trade links between Member States and in turn, assist economic growth.

The European Union welcomed the efforts being made by the commissions in the area of reform. While the commissions must adopt reform programmes reflecting their respective circumstances, there would also be advantages in looking at the similarities and differences between their reform programmes, including the assumptions on which they were based and their objectives. Reform programmes should take into account the need for complementarity between the regional commissions and other parts of the system, as well as their areas of comparative advantage. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/227, it was the expectation of the European Union that the Council would take a decision at the current session to launch a review of the reform process in the regional commissions.

Mr. VALLE (Brazil) speaking on behalf of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, the member States of the Southern Cone Common Market, as well as Bolivia and Chile, said that the member countries of MERCOSUR shared a solid commitment to democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law and also to open markets. Accordingly, they had recently signed an agreement with Chile, and were negotiating a similar accord with Bolivia, with a view to establishing a free-trade area. The United Nations must respond to the growing role of economic regionalism with a strong decentralized presence in the region. The MERCOSUR member States believed that the regional commissions had the technical competence and capacity to bring about the regional integration of United Nations programmes and activities. Indeed, MERCOSUR was convinced that

regionalism and multilateralism were convergent processes. In that connection, MERCOSUR member States viewed with concern the proposals for cuts in resources allocated to the regional commissions since they believed that ECLAC should remain a centre of excellence collaborating with Governments in the analysis of development processes and the formulation, follow-up and evaluation of government policies as well as in the provision of technical assistance in the areas of specialized information, consultancy, technical training and support for regional cooperation. That position did not mean that the regional commissions should not promote reforms. The reform processes must be tailored to the realities of each region. The MERCOSUR member States did not consider it appropriate to single out the reform in the regional commissions as an agenda item for the following year. Such reforms must be considered as part of the overall discussions on the subsidiary machinery of the Council, which included the functional commissions.

Mrs. DREYFUS STADTHAGEN (Nicaragua) said that the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation did not sufficiently emphasize the important work of ECLAC in supporting the countries of the Central American region. Global problems, such as those addressed in the recent series of world conferences, undoubtedly had regional aspects, and the regional commissions could help to harmonize positions within the multilateral system, as ECLAC had done in preparing a regional plan for Latin America for housing and human settlements in preparation for the recent United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. They could also help to implement at the regional level the commitments made at international conferences.

Her delegation was very interested to learn that ESCAP and ECLAC had agreed to undertake studies (E/1996/45, para. 116) on the prospects and potential for mutual trade and investment cooperation, and would eagerly await the results of those studies.

On the issue of reform of the regional commissions she said that consideration must be given to the role each Commission had played in its region. Considering that the review process had reached an advanced stage, her delegation believed that it was not necessary to include an item on the regional commissions in the agenda for the next session of the Council.

ECLAC had played an important role in research and analysis in the economic, social and development fields both at the national level and at the

level of Central American integration. Her delegation welcomed cooperation efforts with Central American integration bodies, particularly with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, in order to develop mechanisms to promote investment. Recent meetings of the Central American Economic Cooperation Committee and between the Presidents of the Central American region and Chile represented important efforts in bilateral cooperation that would yield positive results in the areas of investment, trade and education.

Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that his delegation appreciated the contributions of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) towards the establishment of subregional economic groupings and commended it for its ongoing efforts to assist member States to diversify their production structures. He urged it to intensify its efforts to promote Africa's external trade prospects. He also commended ECA for its efforts to attract foreign direct investment, and supported suggestions for a project which would involve the development of an investment and trade network centred around regional chambers of commerce and industry. His delegation endorsed the proposal (E/1996/45, para. 119) for a joint ECA-ESCAP project focusing on technical cooperation among developing countries, as a follow-up to the Asia-Africa forum held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1994.

In terms of reform, ECA had placed a strategic focus on a few priority areas where it had comparative advantage, with gender and capacity-building as cross-cutting themes. Since it was imperative to integrate regional considerations in the analysis of global problems, regional commissions had an important role to play in the future, and should be adequately strengthened.

Mr. KIWANUKA (Uganda), speaking on behalf of Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, said that East African cooperation had been relaunched in March 1996 with the inauguration of the Secretariat of the East African Cooperation in Arusha, Tanzania. Before its 1977 collapse, the East African Community had been the oldest, most elaborate and most successful economic cooperation arrangement in Africa. Although it had collapsed primarily for political reasons, its members firmly believed in the benefits of regional cooperation and had once again mustered the political will to begin afresh.

The new arrangement would be based on an incremental approach, building on the elements uniting the three countries. First, they had agreed to liberalize their currencies in order to promote trade and facilitate commercial

transactions, because of a firm belief that successful cooperation must be spurred by the private sector. They had resolved to encourage free movement of persons in the region through the issuance of an East African travel document. They would then harmonize taxation systems, customs and transport regulations. They would also coordinate broad economic and social policy issues and would take a common approach in the use of shared waters and other natural resources and agriculture.

Although they held no illusions that the task would be easy, the three countries would work hard to broaden and deepen cooperation within the region and to pursue the broader aim of achieving economic integration of the African continent. It was their hope that the international community would support their endeavour.

Ms. McNISH (Jamaica) said that the regional commissions were making an important contribution to the development process. They played an important coordinating role in bringing issues of regional interest to the global arena and, conversely, raising global issues in regional forums. In that regard, ECLAC was relevant and important to the region particularly since it was the only regional institution involved in the analysis of developmental issues from an economic perspective. However, her delegation was concerned that the reports on the work of the Commission and the survey of economic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean made very few references to the Caribbean member States of ECLAC, provided scanty disaggregated data and made no specific references to Caribbean experiences in net capital in-flows, current accounts, external financing or trade, which were of critical importance to the region. Important developments in terms of intraregional trade for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) had been ignored.

There were fundamental differences between the economies of the Caribbean and those of Latin America, and economic performance in the Caribbean should not be subsumed under the general rubric of Latin America. That position had been reiterated at the twenty-sixth session of the Commission in Costa Rica. The Caribbean States were already marginalized by virtue of their small size and her delegation looked forward to a more balanced approach in reporting on economic trends and performance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. ŽEBRAKOVSKÝ (Czech Republic) said that the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) had expanded considerably; over the previous five years nearly half

its members were countries in transition, and several of them could be classified as among the least developed countries. However, the assistance needs of such countries were very different from those of developing countries. The Commission should focus on solving regional problems, as well as global problems, such as the environment. The Commission should also address the problem of the transformation of State-controlled economies into free market economies and the harmonization of regional activities with those of development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme.

The proposed declaration on strengthening economic cooperation in Europe, which was in the process of being elaborated, was intended to provide long-term direction for ECE by establishing a limited number of priorities. He welcomed the fact that most ECE activities were grounded in experience, expertise, comparative advantages and independent analyses. His delegation supported ECE reforms aimed at eliminating unnecessary overlaps with other international bodies and at improving programme coordination, adding that the Commission should continue to encourage close involvement of the business community in its work and cooperation with non-governmental organizations. While he was aware of the current financial difficulties of the United Nations system, he felt that the Commission should be given additional resources as a result of the elimination of duplication in the activities of other United Nations bodies in order to be able to use its comparative advantages effectively.

Mr. TANASESCU (Romania) said that the restructuring process at ECE had already resulted in improved efficiency through the streamlining of the organization's procedures. The Commission had established new targets for cooperation among European States and had intensified regional cooperation on environmental issues. In that regard, it had sponsored legal agreements on the protection of the atmosphere and on regional watercourses. ECE had also played a key role in facilitating the integration of the economies in transition into the European and world economies. It had also followed up on the major global conferences held in recent years contributing to the implementation at the regional level of the plans and programmes adopted by such conferences. In that regard, he welcomed the support provided by ECE, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, to his Government in the preparation and organization of the conference on women's issues in the countries in transition to be held in Bucharest in

September 1996. In his view, the annual studies prepared by the Commission on both macroeconomic and sectoral developments probably constituted the area where the regional commissions had a net comparative advantage.

Mr. VIVAS (Venezuela) said that ECLAC had demonstrated its usefulness to the Governments of the region by constantly adapting its work to new realities and improving its efficiency. The Commission had made major contributions by formulating proposals on a number of items relating to the development of Latin American and Caribbean countries and had combined analytical work with operational services in the areas of specialized information, advisory services and support for regional and international cooperation. Moreover, it had made considerable efforts to interact with a wide range of actors from the public, private and academic sectors of various member countries. Finally, at the twenty-sixth session of the Commission, measures had been proposed to improve its effectiveness which deserved support. In that regard, an open-ended intergovernmental committee had been established with the mandate to work out priorities for the Commission's work programme and to propose strategic orientations for its future activities.

Mr. GERUS (Belarus) said that his delegation appreciated the role of the Economic Commission for Europe in the process of strengthening intergovernmental relations in the economic sphere, and in particular for its activities in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe during their transition period. It had worked successfully to integrate the transportation networks of the different countries into a general European transportation system, established an energy efficiency zone for the countries of Eastern Europe, and simplified international trade procedures. It had also participated in activities undertaken by Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation to minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Future activities should take into account the new realities in the region and should place greater priority on the development of countries with economies in transition, giving new impetus to closer economic integration in the region. In the view of his delegation, decentralization of activities and resources to the regional economic commissions would allow them to react more appropriately to changes in the economy or the dynamics of various problems, both on the country and the regional level. Efforts to strengthen cooperation between ECE, the European Union and other subregional organizations were welcome. Its

assistance to the countries with economies in transition would be most effective if it benefited from an appropriate level of funding.

Mr. POERNOMO (Indonesia) said that the tasks of the regional commissions had grown as a result of the commitments and agreements adopted at recent United Nations global conferences. They must now direct their attention to assisting Member States in the implementation of the various programmes and platforms for action. The role of the commissions had become particularly important in the light of the promotion of cooperation among United Nations agencies and other regional and subregional organizations in particular with respect to cross-sectoral issues in the follow-up process. It was encouraging to note that the commissions were responding to the new challenges by adapting their activities to the realities in their respective regions. Their response was particularly encouraging in view of the fact that resources available to them were becoming increasingly scarce. The decline in financial resources was ironic given that it was occurring just as the regional commissions were being called on to shoulder heavier responsibilities and at a time when they had undertaken serious efforts to reform and restructure in order to effectively meet the tasks assigned to them. The reform process could not take place in a vacuum but must be part of the broader mission entrusted to the United Nations; that mission included enabling the Members to adequately respond to the emerging challenges and opportunities of the international economic environment. However, the piecemeal approach resulting from the reform process was having a negative impact on the effectiveness and relevance of the regional commissions. The Council must provide clear and coherent direction on the future path that needed to be pursued by the United Nations system as a whole, including the regional commissions, in order to achieve sustainable human development in an efficient and effective manner.

His delegation attached great importance to finding ways and means of ensuring that the regional commissions effectively discharged their mandates. The Council must therefore provide full support to the regional commissions in carrying out the tasks assigned to them.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.40
6 January 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 18 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. RIVA (Argentina)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS (continued)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza.

96-80956 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Riva (Argentina), Vice-President, took the chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS (continued) (E/1996/45 and Add.1, E/1996/46-50; E/1996/NGO/4)

Mr. BERTHELOT (Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)), replying to questions raised in the discussion, said, with regard to the recent global conferences, that for reasons of economy and efficiency, the task forces established to coordinate follow-up to the conferences had been distributed among the regional economic commissions in accordance with their particular areas of expertise. All the regional commissions were contributing to follow-up activities with respect to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The ECE was pursuing that follow-up work within the framework of the "Environment for Europe" process, and in collaborative efforts with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the countries of the region. It was serving as the secretariat for those combined efforts. ECE also was involved in preparations for a conference on transport and the environment to be held in 1997.

The executive secretaries of the regional commissions had exchanged their views on the subject of reform and would continue to do so. With regard to cooperation, ECE maintained close cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for example, on matters relating to the environment, trade facilitation and assistance to countries in Central Asia. ECE considered its cooperation with non-United Nations organizations active in the region to be an important aspect of the reform process, and the subject would be discussed by member Governments the following week in Geneva.

A number of delegations ha[illegible]ted that, although ECE now had many more members than it had had just five years earlier, its budget had not increased commensurately. Nevertheless, the Commission had become more effective. He

emphasized that the Commission's secretariat could not perform its work properly if its resources were spread over too many activities or countries. The current effort to establish priorities in all ECE activities would help to focus them more clearly.

Lastly, he said that he had taken note of the comments made by some delegations regarding the importance of assistance to countries in transition and to other countries in the region which required special attention.

Ms. BETTELLI (Colombia) said that regional cooperation and globalization were mutually beneficial and that the regional commissions had made an invaluable contribution to the international community, in particular, the developing countries. Indeed, the United Nations would be unable to function effectively without a regional perspective. Regional contributions to the preparations for, convening of and follow-up to the major international conferences were very valuable, as exemplified by the plan of action on human settlements for Latin America and the Caribbean which had been incorporated in the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). She underscored the important role of the regional commissions with respect to cross-cutting issues - such as poverty eradication - dealt with by the Council.

The regional commissions facilitated the identification of economic trends, analysis and policy formulation and helped to strengthen endogenous capacities with respect to science and technology, industrialization, infrastructure and communications, often serving as a catalyst for South-South Cooperation. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) had long contributed to sustained economic growth in the region through, inter alia, the periodic and timely identification of emerging macroeconomic trends. The objective of the Commission should continue to be to contribute to sustained economic growth in the region, and that objective therefore should be reiterated in the next medium-term plan.

ECLAC had demonstrated its capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and to formulate novel development models for its member States. Her delegation therefore viewed with concern proposals made in some forums to diminish the role of the regional commissions or transfer their functions to other bodies. General Assembly resolution 50/227 clearly stipulated that the review of the regional commissions should be conducted with a view to strengthening and

enhancing their effectiveness. Her delegation therefore agreed with the representative of Brazil that reform should be discussed within the framework of the overall discussion of the Council's subsidiary machinery. The Council's message should be one of unequivocal support for the regional commissions.

Ms. CHANDRAPRABHA (Thailand) said that the ESCAP programme of work and activities had made a substantial contribution to the sustainable development of the region, in particular, in the least developed, landlocked and Pacific island countries. Her delegation also welcomed the work of the other regional economic commissions on poverty alleviation.

Most national, regional and subregional political tensions and conflicts grew out of economic and social disparities. In order to prevent such conflicts, the United Nations system should invest more heavily in preventive measures than in peacekeeping operations, directing adequate resources to the programmes of work of the regional economic commissions, the specialized agencies and relevant development organizations.

Her delegation noted with concern the reduction of resources in the programme budget of ESCAP for the 1996-1997 biennium, a reduction which would have a significant impact on its work in the key areas of trade policy and promotion, the environment, women in development and infrastructure development. It was essential to bear in mind that ESCAP was inhabited by 60 per cent of the world's population, including some of the poorest people on the planet. That factor must be taken into account when addressing questions of programme planning and resource allocation to the regional economic commissions.

Lastly, her delegation was grateful to the Government of China for offering to host a symposium on development challenges and opportunities for Asia and the Pacific in the twenty-first century and the role of ESCAP. It hoped that the outcome of the conference would lead to a more coherent framework for cooperation among the countries of the region on economic, social and related issues.

Mr. KAMANDO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation associated itself with the statements made by Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Uganda on behalf of the East African Community member States.

His delegation agreed with the conclusion in paragraph 170 of the report (E/1996/45) that the regional commissions were well placed to carry out

efficiently the tasks and functions referred to in the report. However, the regional commissions should develop their cooperation with the rest of the United Nations system, especially at the country level, so as to exploit the synergies between the different components of the United Nations system. The regional commissions must be provided with the resources which they needed to execute their programmes.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) should play a proactive role in assisting subregional and regional cooperation groupings to overcome the problems they were facing and in particular to promote inter-African trade, which had been identified as the weak link in regional cooperation and integration. Urgent attention must also be paid to horizontal and vertical diversification and infrastructure development.

His delegation welcomed the reform and the renewal programme which the Executive Secretary had instituted in ECA and appealed to the international community to support that initiative by providing adequate resources. In addition, the multinational programming and operational centres must be strengthened so that ECA could better serve its membership.

Mr. TCHULKOV (Russian Federation) said that his delegation agreed that the regional commissions were carrying out an important role in regional cooperation and that they should cooperate more closely with the Bretton Woods institutions. It supported the efforts made by ECE to diversify the forms and methods of its work so as to assist countries of the region in making the transition to a market economy. However, it felt that ECE could expand its potential considerably through more active cooperation with other multilateral bodies, particularly the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Union. His delegation was also in favour of the further development of cooperation in the Mediterranean area and believed that the three Mediterranean regional commissions, ECE, ECA and ESCWA, along with other bodies of the United Nations system, could coordinate such cooperation to supplement other regional efforts. ECE could prepare reports on a regular basis, describing the coordination of United Nations work in that sphere.

His delegation welcomed the positive changes in the programme activity of ESCAP designed, in particular, to mitigate social problems, especially in the

least developed and island developing countries and the countries in transition. It also supported the ESCAP effort to promote subregional and inter-subregional economic cooperation, particularly in North-East Asia.

ECE and ESCAP had done much to reform their programme activity and intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms, a process which should be continued in the interests of a productive use of resources. In that respect, ECE, whose membership had increased from 34 to 55 countries over the past five years, with virtually zero budget growth, was successfully meeting reform objectives.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that the programmes and activities of ESCAP, including its high-quality analytical reports, had been of considerable value to the countries of the region, particularly in view of their varied economic development models and geophysical and social diversity. Notwithstanding various constraints, many Governments, including his own, had somewhat strengthened their capacity for economic analysis, planning and policy design. Partly as a result of ESCAP influence on national thinking and the policy framework development process, the countries of the region had established many regional and subregional organizations to enhance cooperation and integration.

ESCAP and other instruments for regional collaboration and integration, which had been weakened by both internal and external developments, should be strengthened and expanded, to which end adequate resources were essential. The continuing utility and effectiveness of the Commission should be evaluated and enhanced in close consultation with the Governments of the region. Coordination between the United Nations Secretariat, the regional commissions and other regional arrangements and agencies, pursued in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations and their mandates, would contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the promotion of an integrated and effective approach to development at the regional level. His delegation was pleased to note that ESCAP had already taken initiatives to that end.

Mr. RAICHEV (Bulgaria) said that his country was committed to the efforts of the international community to restore normality, secure stability and promote the economic reconstruction of the countries affected by war in the Balkan region. The reconstruction process created opportunities for the countries partly to mitigate the adverse impact on their economies of the sanctions imposed against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Balkan

conference on stability, security and cooperation in South-Eastern Europe held at Sofia in July 1996 had reconfirmed the determination of the States of the region to transform it into an area of stability, security and cooperation. The Conference had emphasized the need to extend good-neighbourly relations and enhance cooperation on economic, infrastructure, humanitarian, social and cultural matters.

Economic cooperation provided the key to post-war peace and to confidence, security and stability in the region. His delegation attached particular importance to bilateral and multilateral transborder cooperation. The development of the transport, telecommunications and energy infrastructure in the region was vital to trade and economic growth and to attracting capital flows. Cooperation with countries participating in the Central European Initiative and the Black Sea economic cooperation group was of paramount importance.

He described a number of initiatives under way in the Balkan region to promote cooperation with respect to the transport infrastructure and telecommunications and postal services. Trade, tourism and investment must be promoted with a view to the sustainable economic development of the region, the reconstruction and rehabilitation of war-torn areas and the region's integration into the global economy. The conclusion of bilateral agreements on free trade areas in conformity with relevant European Community regulations and provisions of the World Trade Organization agreements would be a positive contribution to that end. To attract foreign investment, consideration should be given, inter alia, to establishing a Balkan investment bank, a regional centre for business information and a regional centre for trade promotion.

Regional cooperation in South-Eastern Europe also focused on the protection of the environment and humanitarian, social and cultural issues, together with justice, crime prevention, the fight against illicit traffic in drugs and weapons, terrorism and illegal migration. His delegation was confident that the joint efforts and goodwill of the Balkan countries, in the context of pan-European collaboration, would enable the region to move towards economic development and stability.

Mr. ABDELLATIF (Egypt) said that his delegation concurred with the conclusions set out in paragraph 167 of the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/45) with regard to reform of the regional commissions and the

responsibility of the member States concerned for decisions taken on that question. There was indeed a need to incorporate regional considerations into the analysis of global problems and to harmonize regional and international cooperation along the lines suggested in paragraph 169 of the same report.

With regard to the ECA, his delegation wished to express its support for the new strategic framework document submitted to the Conference of Ministers earlier in the year. Priority should be accorded to food security, the revitalization of regional cooperation, women and capacity-building. In that context, the system-wide Special Initiative on Africa should be seen as a complement to the United Nations New Agenda for Development of Africa in the 1990s.

The important work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) had been adversely affected by events in the Middle East, which had caused the Commission to move offices on a number of occasions. Egypt supported the reorganization of the Commission so that it could better reflect the work of the United Nations agencies, respond to the needs of its member States and play the role which current circumstances dictated.

With all the changes in the world economy, the regional commissions had gained in importance, underlining the need for a review of the current roles of United Nations bodies.

Mr. OTUYELU (Observer for Nigeria) called upon the Council to support the ongoing review of the working methods of all the regional commissions and to provide the additional resources they needed to strengthen their effectiveness. He endorsed the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and noted with satisfaction that the European Union had recognized the value of the regional commissions in facilitating regional cooperation among Member States.

There was a need for enhanced collaboration between the regional commissions and other organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system. He therefore supported the suggestion that the executive secretaries of the regional commissions should be allowed to participate in future high-level sessions of the Council where relevant.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that her delegation endorsed the statement of the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and

China and would welcome the participation of the executive secretaries in high-level sessions of the Council.

It appreciated the commitment of ESCAP to ensuring that all the countries of the region participated in economic growth and suggested that ESCAP activities in pursuit of that goal should focus on economic infrastructure, trade, technology transfers and projects for human resource development within the region.

Mr. AMMARIN (Jordan) said that regional cooperation was vital to the enhancement of South-South cooperation as a means of moving towards South-North cooperation and dialogue. The enhancement of international cooperation for economic growth and development, the eradication of poverty and the preservation of the environment were prerequisites for preserving global peace and security, and the regional commissions had a major role to play in forging regional cooperation. In that regard, ESCWA was making a significant contribution, despite harsh financial conditions.

The signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel had become a model for cooperation in a region whose economic growth and development had been adversely affected by many years of hostilities. The activities of ESCWA, ranging from the management of natural resources and the environment to the improvement of economic development and cooperation, were of vital importance to the region. Socio-economic efforts had to be enhanced in order to promote a comprehensive peace and a prosperous future.

Mr. TALBOT (Guyana) said that the regional commissions' valuable contributions to policy formulation, multilateral processes and global consensus-building deserved to be continued and enhanced. He was gratified by the active participation of ECLAC in the establishment of the Association of Caribbean States and the benefits being derived from ECLAC programmes by the region as a whole. At the same time, his delegation shared the concerns of the Jamaican delegation regarding deficiencies in ECLAC analysis and reporting on the Caribbean. Moreover, there was a need for particular sensitivity on the part of all the regional commissions with regard to the possible marginalization of smaller regional economies as a result of the globalization of the world economy.

Efforts by the regional commissions to prepare and follow up major global conferences deserved the Council's continued support, as did their work on

reform and restructuring. Without adequate resources, however, the regional commissions would not be able to function effectively.

Ms. KRISHNA (India) said that ESCAP had made significant progress in fostering an environment conducive to sustained economic growth and development in the region and had embarked successfully on the process of restructuring and reform. Its various programmes, including the regional export credit guarantee facility and the tourism directory, promised to greatly enhance regional cooperation, and it had done commendable work in furthering South-South cooperation by facilitating the transfer of technology through various institutions. Moreover, its follow-up to the recommendations of major international conferences deserved the Council's support. ESCAP experience of coordination with subregional organizations, as well as with and among various development agencies, could provide valuable insights for the Council's own coordination segment.

Mr. NAZARI TAJABADI (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) noted that in paragraph 109 of the ESCAP annual report (E/1996/36) emphasis was placed on the importance of adequate infrastructure, particularly transport and communications facilities, to promote international trade, tourism and regional economic cooperation. In paragraph 110 the Commission recognized the importance of the Asian land transport infrastructure development (ALTID) project, and in paragraph 222 it noted with appreciation the new railway line linking the railways of Iran and Turkmenistan, thereby connecting East and Central Asia to Europe.

He recalled that in 1992 ESCAP had merged its sectoral committees into new thematic committees but had decided that the Committee on Transport and Communications would continue its work as a non-thematic committee until 1997. Since ESCAP had entrusted that Committee with the task of strengthening infrastructure in the region, he asked how the Committee would be able to carry out that work at 1997, given the inadequacy of funds.

Recalling that, with a view to strengthening subregional cooperation, ESCAP had initiated the organization of annual joint meetings of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the Secretaries-General of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization, he inquired about ESCAP activities and policies in that regard.

In view of the growing membership of the World Trade Organization, he asked what the future of the Bangkok Agreement and the Asian Clearing Union would be and whether ESCAP could strengthen those arrangements and encourage active participation in intraregional trade.

ESCAP recognized that environmental problems were linked to poverty, population and socio-economic development, and that national priorities varied from country to country. With the decline in official development assistance and the new conditionalities that were being imposed by regional financial institutions, and considering that only a few countries in the region benefited from foreign investment flows, he asked what ways and means there were for strengthening ESCAP so as to respond to those challenges.

Mr. SHAPIRO (United States of America) said that his delegation supported the efforts of the regional commissions to streamline and reform their work programmes, especially with regard to setting priorities and eliminating duplication and overlap with other organizations. Further improvements were needed to ensure that the commissions operated efficiently and made unique contributions to the priority needs of their constituent States. He urged ESCWA to join the other regional commissions in initiating a priority-setting exercise and a true reform programme.

Mr. BAHAMONDES (Canada) suggested that a different format for discussing the reports of the regional commissions would encourage a more open and productive dialogue. In that regard, he endorsed the comments of the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Referring to document E/1996/49, he observed that, despite the valuable work carried out by ECLAC in the Caribbean, the summary of developments in the region in 1995 lacked information on the economic performance of the Caribbean countries and the considerable challenges they faced. He hoped that the summary for 1996 would provide more comprehensive coverage of the region. Finally, he agreed with previous speakers that the Council should endeavour to devote more attention to the substantive matters raised by the regional commissions and the need for strengthened links between regionalism and multilateralism.

Ms. BAI Yongjie (China) expressed her delegation's appreciation for the work done by ESCAP to promote broad cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in facilitating the participation of the region's developing countries in economic and social development. While ESCAP had embarked on

structural reforms, further effort was necessary in order for it to strengthen its role in the region. Such reforms should respond to the actual situation and needs of the region, particularly those of its developing countries, and should be orderly and consensus-based.

In view of the preponderance of poor people among the population of the region, ESCAP should focus on actively assisting in the gradual reduction and elimination of poverty. Its upcoming fiftieth anniversary would provide an opportunity to explore ways for it to further strengthen regional cooperation.

Mr. KAID (Observer for Yemen) commended the work carried out by ESCWA and urged the Council to ensure that all the regional commissions received the necessary funding to enable them to carry out their mandates.

Mr. VARCHAVER (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)) drew attention to document E/1996/NGO/4, which described the inter-parliamentary process of security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The process involved a dynamic approach designed to foster the settlement of conflicts and their prevention.

The Final Document of the first Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, held in June 1992, had established the general framework for cooperation between the Mediterranean partners. A second conference, held in Valletta in November 1995, had confirmed the need to provide a solid institutional basis for Mediterranean cooperation at both governmental and parliamentary levels. The inter-parliamentary process had enabled Governments to test initiatives or sound out positions which were not responsive to conventional diplomatic action. It had already been decided to establish an inter-State mechanism for security and cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

Mr. AMOAKO (Economic Commission for Africa) said that the Commission had been actively involved in the follow-up to major international conferences and, with the support of several agencies, was setting up an African women's leadership fund to promote women's rights and empowerment in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Commission had also organized meetings between ministers for human development and the environment to discuss follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and implementation of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. ECA, which served as secretariat for the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, was working with the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) to ensure the successful implementation of the Special Initiative. Finally, he agreed with the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on the need for greater collaboration between the regional commissions and other United Nations bodies, in particular UNDP, to improve delivery of programmes at the country level.

Mr. ROSENTHAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) said that he had taken note of the statements of the representatives of Jamaica, Guyana and Canada requesting that ECLAC devote more attention to the Caribbean countries and assured the representatives of Ireland, United States and Canada of the commitment of the ECLAC secretariat to priority-setting within the framework of the economic and social restructuring of the United Nations.

Mr. MOOY (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) said he was encouraged by the desire of Council members to hold a dialogue with the executive secretaries and by the proposal to place the item under discussion on the agenda of the high-level segment in the interests of interaction with other senior officials.

ESCAP would continue to promote subregional and inter-subregional cooperation, especially in the area of transport linkages and the environment, by providing a forum for consultations among the different subregional groupings. Such forums enabled subregions to learn from each other's experiences, including such successes as promotion of growth triangles, tourism initiatives and attraction of foreign direct investment.

With regard to a question of the observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said that transport and communication would continue to play an important role in ESCAP programmes. In reply to another inquiry, he said that the Asian Clearing Union, whose members included the central banks of the Asia-Pacific region, was conducting a study to find ways to improve its operations in conformity with the activities of the World Trade Organization. Finally, the Asia-Pacific region was encouraging the emergent countries of the region to take advantage of the special cooperation funds set up by Japan, Australia, China and the Republic of Korea.

Mr. EL-BEBLAWI (Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), referring to comments made by the representative of the United States, said that ESCWA had begun its restructuring in late 1993 and had continued the process throughout 1994. During that period, 15 subprogrammes had been merged into five

more highly focused programmes based on a thematic and multidisciplinary approach. Its restructuring process having been completed, the Commission was currently immersed in its substantive work.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to three draft resolutions recommended by ESCAP for adoption by the Council (E/1996/45/Add.1, para. 1).

Draft resolution I was adopted.

Draft resolution II was adopted.

Draft resolution III was adopted.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to a draft decision recommended by ECLAC for adoption by the Council (E/1996/45/Add.1, para. 2).

The draft decision was adopted.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to a draft resolution recommended by ECA for adoption by the Council (E/1996/45/Add.1., para. 3).

The draft resolution was adopted.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the following documents: the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/1996/45 and Add.1); the summary of the economic survey of Europe, 1995 (E/1996/46); the summary of the survey of economic and social conditions in Africa, 1995 (E/1996/47); the summary of the survey of economic and social conditions in Asia and the Pacific, 1995 (E/1996/48); the summary of the economic survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995 (E/1996/49); and the summary of economic and social developments in the ESCWA region, 1995 (E/1996/50);

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.